

Tenant & Resident Scrutiny Panel



Brighton & Hove

February 2014

Housing Customer Service Panel Report

Panel Members:

**Dave Murtagh (Chair)
Chief Blackbear
Philip Bradick
Lesley Cope**

Chair's Foreword

This has been a very informative scrutiny panel which it has been my privilege to chair. I have learned a lot about how the Housing Customer Service team work, as well as the scrutiny process.

We held two panel meetings and visited the Whitehawk hub, where the Housing Customer Service team (HCST) are based, as well as the Oxford Street Housing Office. The panel heard first hand about the key issues from the HCST, the Executive Director of Environment, Development & Housing and other senior housing staff. We saw lots of good practice and would like to thank the Housing Customer Service team for welcoming this scrutiny opportunity.

A key focus of this report is the need to improve, or replace, the information communication technology (ICT) systems used by the service. It was very clear to the panel that their current ICT was not fit for purpose, as it could not produce the performance information needed and the team had to work through lengthy processes to enter tenant data.

We hope this report is able to help secure much needed, and timely, improvements to the ICT system. The panel also welcomes the intention to co-locate the team at the Housing Centre. We believe these changes will make sure tenants receive an even more effective service and the team have more efficient ICT to work with.

The panel's only disappointment was that it was not able to generate a greater response from tenants and residents to its survey. I am hoping that this report increases awareness of the Brighton & Hove Tenant & Resident Scrutiny Panel, so more residents contribute to the scrutiny process next time round.

I would like to finish by expressing gratitude to the members of the panel: Chief Blackbear, Philip Bradick and Lesley Cope, all of who it has been a pleasure to work with. I'm sure they will join me in thanking all those involved in this scrutiny process.

Dave Murtagh

Chair of the Housing Customer Service Tenant & Resident Scrutiny Panel

Deputy Chair of the Tenant & Resident Scrutiny Panel

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 The Housing Customer Service team (HCST) provides a single point of contact telephone number. It has been in operation since July 2012 and the panel felt it was a good time to find out how this new service was meeting the needs of residents.
- 1.2 The HCST were extremely helpful and provided comprehensive information to the panel. Members of the team spoke about their key concerns, namely:
 - The current information communication technology (ICT) being used by the service (see footnote for definition¹)
 - The benefits that could come from being located with housing colleagues at the Housing Centre
 - Some staff were keen to ensure they could make the most of opportunities for their career development.
- 1.3 Senior managers also emphasised the importance of having ICT systems which were fit for purpose. This report recommends as a key priority that the Housing Service develops a business plan for the introduction of the most effective ICT system possible to support this service. This would enable the service to consistently deliver its key service target, to resolve 80% of queries at the first point of contact.
- 1.4 The panel felt that currently there was insufficient customer focused data which could show how well the service was responding residents and meeting its service targets.
- 1.5 The Housing Customer Service team is also responsible for covering the five housing office reception desks, from Monday to Friday. The panel felt the service sometimes struggled to answer the volume of enquiries during their peak times and were working to full capacity. It was hoped that the planned closure of the existing Selsfield Drive housing office may enable the service to reorganise the team to better meet the service demands.

2. List of recommendations

- 2.1 The panel would like to make the following recommendations based on the evidence they heard:

Recommendation 1

The panel believes that investment in ICT is vital to support the Housing Customer Service Team, as well as other housing services. It

¹ Information Communication Technology is a term for all of the technologies used to communicate information, divided into a) computer based systems and software packages, such as Customer Relation Management (CRM) and b) networks based systems such as the internet.

recommends that the Head of Housing commits to exploring the corporate Customer Experience Management (CEM) platform, being rolled out in other services, to see if there is a business case to be presented to the Customer Access Programme Board for it being introduced as a priority for the Housing Service.

Recommendation 2

The panel would like to know how the Housing Service is planning to improve its ICT systems. Therefore the panel recommends that:

- **The Head of Housing provides a position statement² on ICT for the April 2014 Housing Committee meeting.**
- **The Head of Housing produces a business plan for ICT in the Housing Service, including the Housing Customer Service Team. This would include short, medium and long term objectives, to be provided within four months of this panel report going to committee (August 2014). This business plan should be provided to the Tenant and Resident Scrutiny Panel and presented to Housing Committee.**
- **The funding information in the business plan should include whether the Housing Revenue Account could be used to fund the introduction of ICT improvements as a matter of priority.**

The panel would like to see the business plan for ICT to feed into the business planning process for the Housing Customer Service Team and any other relevant teams.

Recommendation 3

While the OHMS computer system continues to be used, the panel feels it is beneficial to recommend that its service and cost effectiveness is evaluated to determine whether future investment is needed for upgrades to the system to meet service needs. The evaluation could also assess whether consideration needs to be given to the replacement of the housing management ICT system in the longer term. The findings of this evaluation should be incorporated into the business plan for ICT and the relevant business plans for the Housing Service.

Recommendation 4

The panel feel that the Housing Customer Service team should plan to co-locate their telephone contact centre to the Housing Centre. This would help staff to network to resolve residents' cases quicker because the team require strong links with many other specialist teams, most of

² The position statement would be a short report on the current ICT situation in the Housing Service, in particular the Housing Customer Service Team and what is currently known about the plans to improve ICT.

which are based at the Housing Centre. If this relocation is being planned, the panel would like to know when it will happen. The panel also seeks reassurance that the effect of any relocation of the service is taken into account in the business plan for ICT.

3. Introduction

- 3.1 The panel carried out this review after the first year of the new Housing Customer Service team (HCST) to see if they could identify any recommendations on how to improve the service.
- 3.2 The panel welcomed the extensive information and help provided by the HCST in carrying out this review. The panel's key concern was that the team's work seemed to be hampered by the ineffective ICT system it was using. The lack of performance information that the service can currently collect, meant that it was not possible for the panel to assess whether the HCST is meeting its key service target of resolving 80% of queries first time.
- 3.3 The focus of the panel's recommendations is to seek assurance that a business plan is being produced to ensure that the service is situated in the right place and has the right tools to do the job.

4. The scope of the panel

- 4.1 The panel agreed the scope would be to:
 - 1. Focus on what **specific queries** are dealt with by the Housing Customer Service team through telephone calls and possible face to face contact at the reception desks, (but not to follow the query into any of the other housing service teams). This is to keep the focus of this pilot scrutiny short and sharp.
 - 2. See if the Housing Customer Service team who deal with general housing enquiries (but not repairs enquiries) for residents are **meeting the needs of its residents**.
 - 3. Identify if there any **improvements** that the service could make.

5. How the panel collected evidence

Dates	Meeting
6 & 19 August 2013	Scope of the panel
18 September	Evidence gathering private scoping meeting with the Housing Customer Service team and James Pemberton – Performance & Improvement Officer (included visiting the Contact Centre at Whitehawk Hub.)

24 September	Evidence gathering Public meeting, Whitehawk library: Geoff Raw - Executive Director for Environment, Development and Housing, Jugal Sharma - Head of Housing, Ododo Dafe - Head of Income, Involvement & Improvement Hilary Edgar – Operations Manager, Janet Dowdell – Housing Customer Service Manager, Lucie Royall – Team Leader, Ben Reeves & Ellen Fisher – Housing Service Advisors.
22 October	Visit to Oxford Street Housing Office to observe queries at the reception desk.
11 November	Private meeting with Janet Dowdell to view a test version OHMS ³ .

5.1 In addition the panel looked at:

- A resident survey carried out on the internet about Housing Customer Services⁴
- Written evidence provided by the HCST
- Comments on the Brighton & Hove Resident Community Forum website
- Survey form at November 2013 City Assembly (three responses).

5.2 The panel was very impressed by the level of written information given to them by Janet Dowdell, the Housing Customer Service Manager. However they were disappointed by the low level of resident response to their survey and questions posted on the Brighton & Hove Resident Community Forum and will look at ways to improve resident engagement with the panel.

6. The Housing Customer Services team

6.1 How was the HCST set up?

The team is:

'...a dedicated group of Housing Service Advisors (HSAs)...taking all incoming calls to the Housing Offices and acting as a contact team. HSAs...rotate this work with time spent in the five housing offices⁵ providing a reception service, carrying out tenancy visits and other duties.'^{6,7}

³ Open Housing Management System, which is the computer system used by the Housing Service

⁴ An internet survey of over 300 service users carried out in August 2013

⁵ Victoria Road, Oxford Street, Whitehawk Hub, Lavender Street and Selsfield Drive

⁶ Written information provided by the service

- 6.2 The HSAs also manage the recording and distribution of post for the five Housing Offices and customer enquiries to the mailbox housing.customerservices@brighton-hove.gov.uk and to individual housing office email boxes.
- 6.3 This new service was introduced in two phases:
1. From July 2012 the Housing Service Advisors (HSAs) delivered the new service standards from the five Housing Offices. A single contact telephone number – 293030 – was introduced
 2. In January 2013 the telephone service was relocated to the Whitehawk Hub to bring staff together to form the Housing Contact Centre.
- The new team is a combination of existing staff who changed their job role and new staff.
- 6.4 The Housing service uses the OHMS computer system to store all their information. This system was adapted for the Housing Customer Service team to record all contact with residents. The HSAs work to resolve issues at the first contact. If this is not possible, HSAs have access to the ‘call-back’ system for the new Neighbourhood and Tenancy teams.⁸
- 6.5 The panel heard that the Housing Contact Centre cost £500,000 a year.⁹ It was difficult to calculate the cost of this part of the service prior to the restructure as the set up was very different.¹⁰

Why was this service created?

- 6.6 Before the restructure, Housing Management Advisors were responsible for resolving a variety of tenants’ issues in their area. One of the problems with this system was that if a Housing Management Advisor was on leave it was difficult for another Advisor to pick up the case. This resulted in delays resolving cases so residents asked for a more efficient system.
- 6.7 The Housing Service was concerned that tenants with the same queries were receiving *‘inconsistent service levels across the city’*.¹¹ So the aim of the restructuring into a centralised service was to:
- Increase consistency in call handling and advice
 - Develop new procedures and expertise in this area

⁷ Core tasks involve: gas access, assisted bidding, gardening scheme, decorating scheme, leaflets and front of house, adaptations, void decoration vouchers

⁸ Written evidence from the service

⁹ Geoff Raw, minutes from the meeting 24.09.13

¹⁰ Clarification from the service

¹¹ Ododo Dafe, Minutes of the meeting 24.09.13

- Help the newly created HSAs work more closely with their managers.¹²

Future plans for the service

- 6.8 The panel heard that the plan is to move the service to the Housing Centre in 2014 to work alongside the Mears Contact Centre, Property & Investment and the other teams based there.¹³
- 6.9 The panel was aware that the needs of residents may change over time, and the service would need to be particularly open and flexible about planning for this. An example given was the impact of Welfare Reform, including the preparations for the Universal Credit changes and Housing Benefit being paid directly to tenants

The panel heard that:

*'The support for tenants in the future will need to be more specialised, to cover employment advice, mutual exchanges, opening a bank account. This type of service will be different to the traditional avenues of telephone, reception and letter service that the council currently provide.'*¹⁴

Staffing issues

- 6.10 The panel was concerned whether the role of Housing Service Advisor (HSA) offered the career development opportunities which would have once been open to the previous post of Housing Management Advisors (such as moving up to Housing Officers, Lettings Officers or other similar posts). This kind of opportunity may help to increase retention levels and reduce absences. The panel also felt that improvements to the ICT system could also help to have a beneficial effect on the HSAs' work experience.
- 6.11 Although the panel noted the concerns raised by some of the staff, the focus of their review was to assess whether the changes to the service were seen as an improvement by residents.

7. Has setting up this service been a success?

- 7.1 The panel wanted to find out whether the creation of the service had achieved the following:
- Is the customer service desk meeting its service standards?
 - Is the contact centre more efficient than the previous system?
 - Are residents satisfied with the service?

¹² Written evidence to the panel from Customer Services

¹³ Hilary Edgar, Minutes of the meeting 24.09.13

¹⁴ Ododo Dafe, Minutes of the meeting 24.09.13

Meeting service standards

7.2 The Head of Income, Involvement and Improvement told the panel that the target for this service:

*'...was to deal with up to 80% of all customer enquiries coming in...at the first point of contact, leaving 20% being referred for specialist advice.'*¹⁵

7.3 The panel had concerns whether this target of 80% was too high, but the Housing Services Manager thought:

*'The target was achievable and if the service had improved IT systems... [they] would have a clear indication of performance levels and areas that needed improvements.'*¹⁶

7.4 The performance information from the team showed that the average percentage of calls answered from 1 January – 31 August 2013 was 80%.¹⁷ It was uncertain what percentage of telephone calls was resolved at the first point of contact (or within the Housing Customer Service team) and whether the service was meeting their target of 80%.

7.5 The panel were disappointed that it was not able to obtain more performance data and felt that it was important for the HCST to have this data available too. The panel was also unable to measure whether the service was more efficient since the restructure, as there was no data to compare this with.

Are residents satisfied with the service?

7.6 The Housing Service carried out an online survey in August 2013 to find out what residents thought of Customer Services, a year after it had been created. The survey attracted 319 respondents who had access to email or social media.

7.7 The key findings from this survey were:

- 68% of respondents thought the standard of service was 'very good' or 'good' compared to 13% who thought it was 'poor' or 'very poor'
- 76% thought it was either 'very easy' or 'easy' to contact them whatever method used compared to 10% who thought it was 'difficult' or 'very difficult'

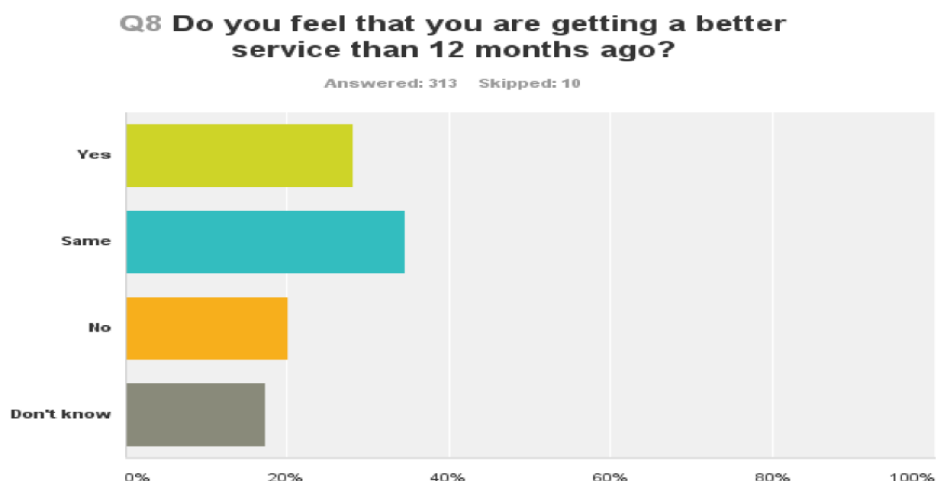
¹⁵ Ododo Dafe, Minutes of the meeting 24.09.13

¹⁶ Janet Dodwell, Minutes of the meeting 24.09.13

¹⁷ Scoping meeting

- 57% felt they were kept up to date with the progress of their enquiry, while 35.5% said they were not
- Almost 53% were not aware that there was a single number for tenant enquiries.

7.8 The final question was *'Do you feel that you are getting a better service than 12 months ago?'*



7.9 Only 28% of the respondents said 'yes' to getting a better service than 12 months ago, 34.5% think it is the 'same', 20% think 'no' and 17% 'don't know'.

7.10 While the panel was pleased to see the high percentage of residents who thought they were getting a good service which was easy to contact, they were concerned that:

- Less than a third of respondents thought they were getting a better service
- Just over a third of respondents did not feel they were kept informed
- Over half of respondents were not aware of the single number.

7.11 The three responses from the survey at City Assembly contained the following observations about contacting the Housing Service:

'When you get through, [they] never phone back.'

'It's very impersonal. I get the impression they do not care.'

*No [its not easier to contact the Housing Service] because we have to wait or call back to speak to whom we need to.'*¹⁸

¹⁸ Survey forms distributed at City Assembly November 2013

7.12 Residents' comments were received by the panel including:

*'Yes it has got easier can't think of any improvements.'*¹⁹

7.13 Geoff Raw, the Executive Director for Environment, Development and Housing told the panel that while customer feedback was *'currently limited'*, such input was:

*'...essential for the service and needed to improve. This would help the service to ensure smarter service delivery.'*²⁰

This *'...feedback would need to be allied with all officers' performance.'*²¹

7.14 It was felt that:

*'Complaints information and recording phone calls to reflect back on challenging situations could be used as opportunities to improve services in the future.'*²²

7.15 Residents were asked for their views on the BHCC Residents Forum <http://bhccresidentcommunity.ning.com/hcspanel>. Although it only attracted a limited number of responses, residents said that:

'Yes, is a more cohesive system and very efficient.'

*'...all very easy to use, although not had all problems solved yet...all been very helpful.'*²³

8. Specific issues facing the service

The telephone and ICT systems

8.1 The panel heard that the quality of ICT provision for this service is crucial as HSAs rely on nine different computer systems to support their work. This includes OHMS and IDOX.²⁴ Staff expressed concerns that current ICT systems could not be used to:

- Text residents, an operational example was that if a lift was out of use the team should be able to text all the affected tenants
- Access the Homemove database to answer tenants' queries, so the residents don't need to queue on the telephone system.

¹⁹ Resident comment on Brighton & Hove City Council Resident Community Forum <http://bhccresidentcommunity.ning.com/tenant-scrutiny-forum2/4>

²⁰ Geoff Raw, Minutes of the meeting 24.09.13

²¹ Minutes of the meeting 24.09.13

²² Questions to the witnesses, panel meeting 24.09.13

²³ <http://bhccresidentcommunity.ning.com/tenant-scrutiny-forum2/3>

²⁴ Written evidence provided by service. OHMS records information and processes for residents and IDOX stores tenancy documentation.

8.2 The panel heard that the ICT systems could not provide performance data which could be used to improve the service. Examples were given of how such data could be useful, to:

- Provide a breakdown of which department the phone calls were forwarded on to
- Identify repeat callers which could indicate a need for a different level of service
- Measure whether the same tenants were using their service or a variety of tenants
- Show a caller's history, for example what other housing services the caller may have used in the past
- Record whether a query passed on to another team had been resolved.²⁵

8.3 Staff had to resort to keeping manual records of which kinds of queries were dealt with at the reception desks. They would hope to be able to record this information on a new ICT system. The service assured the panel that their experience of working with the current ICT system would enable them to choose a new system that would meet their needs.²⁶

8.4 Geoff Raw, the Executive Director Environment, Development and Housing, told the panel that:

*'The need to invest in systems was...a priority....Effective technology was needed so that front line staff could deliver the best service to their customers.'*²⁷

8.5 The panel were given the example of the impact of upgrading ICT, that of University and Colleges Admission Services (UCAS) who had to provide most of their service in a 48 hour period.

*'Initially the service had **250** staff for those 2 days. As a result of a new IT system and students having smart phones, the service was able to reduce their resources to **10** staff during those 2 days.'*²⁸

8.6 While the panel recognised that the council was facing serious reductions in its resources, it believes that improving the ICT system for Housing Customer Services needs to be recognised as a priority. The panel are aware that the council is introducing Customer Experience Management (CEM) software across a range of services over the next 3 years. This software:

²⁵ Minutes of the meeting 24.09.13

²⁶ Scoping meeting notes

²⁷ Geoff Raw, Minutes of the meeting 24.09.13

²⁸ Janet Dowdell, Minutes of the meeting 24.09.13, bold my emphasis

‘...supports the customer interface with council services and databases – this could be through a web transaction but can equally be used on the telephone and at reception points. It is already supporting our staff in the Environment call centre to access information immediately and enables quicker processing of enquiries.’²⁹

8.7 A report to the Policy and Resources Committee (October 17th 2013) described some of the services which are due to receive the CEM software including Council Tax. Given the ICT issues identified in this report, the panel see improving ICT systems as a priority for the Housing Service. The panel have made recommendations 1, 2 & 3 (see below) relating to:

- The introduction of new ICT
- Making the best use of existing software
- Enabling staff to use the data to monitor and improve the service.

Recommendation 1

The panel believes that investment in ICT is vital to support the Housing Customer Service Team, as well as other housing services. It recommends that the Head of Housing commits to exploring the corporate Customer Experience Management (CEM) platform, being rolled out in other services, to see if there is a business case to be presented to the Customer Access Programme Board for it being introduced as a priority for the Housing Service.

Recommendation 2

The panel would like to know how the Housing Service is planning to improve its ICT systems. Therefore the panel recommends that:

- **The Head of Housing provides a position statement³⁰ on ICT for the April 2014 Housing Committee meeting.**
- **The Head of Housing produces a business plan for ICT in the Housing Service, including the Housing Customer Service Team. This would include short, medium and long term objectives, to be provided within four months of this panel report going to committee (August 2014). This business plan should be provided to the Tenant and Resident Scrutiny Panel and presented to Housing Committee.**
- **The funding information in the business plan should include whether the Housing Revenue Account could be used to fund the introduction of ICT improvements as a matter of priority.**

²⁹ Paper to Policy & Resources Committee 17.10.13

[http://present.brighton-hove.gov.uk/Published/C00000689/M00004686/\\$\\$ADocPackPublic.pdf](http://present.brighton-hove.gov.uk/Published/C00000689/M00004686/$$ADocPackPublic.pdf)

³⁰ The position statement would be a short report on the current ICT situation in the Housing Service, in particular the Housing Customer Service Team and what is currently know about the plans to improve ICT.

The panel would like to see the business plan for ICT to feed into the business planning process for the Housing Customer Service Team and any other relevant teams.

Recommendation 3

While the OHMS computer system continues to be used, the panel feels it is beneficial to recommend that its service and cost effectiveness is evaluated to determine whether future investment is needed for upgrades to the system to meet service needs. The evaluation could also assess whether consideration needs to be given to the replacement of the housing management ICT system in the longer term. The findings of this evaluation should be incorporated into the business plan for ICT and the relevant business plans for the Housing Service.

Supporting residents who do not use computers

8.8 A recent survey found that almost 60% used the telephone as the main method of contacting the Housing Customer Service team (HCST).³¹ While the service would like to increase the number of email contacts, a national survey has found that while internet access was rising, almost 70% of local authority tenants in November 2012 still had no access to the internet.³²

8.9 The team suggested a range of ways to interact with these residents:

- Face to face contact at reception desks and then places residents went such as parents evenings and nurseries
- Advertising service information at doctors' surgeries and bus stops
- Signposting to Libraries and Inclusion Team.³³

8.10 A small but growing number of residents were also using social media to contact the Housing service. The BHCC Community Forum received three very positive comments about its effectiveness.

*"I normally contact through the Facebook page! This is something I've only recently started using but yes, it does seem to have a much better response!!"*³⁴

Are there sufficient staff?

8.11 The Housing Services Manager told the panel that:

³¹ Customer Service Survey, August 2013

³² <http://www.insidehousing.co.uk/tenancies/digital-divide-cuts-off-social-tenants/6526788.article>

³³ Minutes of the meeting 24.09.13

³⁴ Resident comment posted on BHCC Community Forum
<http://bhccresidentcommunity.ning.com/tenant-scrutiny-forum2/>

*'It was a challenge to run [the reception areas] of 5 Housing Offices as resources were stretched. This left a maximum of 5 Housing Advisers to manage phone contact on a daily basis. Sometimes there were 44 calls coming in during one hour. This meant that customers were directed onto a queuing system.'*³⁵

- 8.12 The panel heard that there was a significant increase in the volume of calls on a Monday, averaging 250 into the service, generally with four or five staff to deal with them. This increase was thought to be a result of there being no telephone service for residents on Saturday and Sunday. The volume of calls meant that the queuing system had to be used, which was frustrating for residents.³⁶

Are staff being used in the right way?

- 8.13 The panel heard that:

*'It was sometimes frustrating for staff to resource housing offices which had very low footfall. The service could be sending staff to citywide locations where there was a wider tenant audience e.g. at the school gates, in libraries.'*³⁷

- 8.14 According to the resident survey, only 12% of respondents use the local housing office as their main method of contacting the service. However, almost a third of the staff were being used to cover these offices.³⁸ Records kept by the service showed that the number of customers seen by the reception staff in different housing offices per day ranged from five to 62.³⁹
- 8.15 It has been agreed by Housing Committee that Selsfield Drive Housing Office can be closed by the end of 2013/14.⁴⁰ The panel understand the reasons for the closure of this Housing Office as residents switch to other ways of contacting the Housing Service, including telephone and on-line. This would free up the equivalent of two full-time HSA positions to do more targeted support to tenants, such as preparing for welfare reform changes, and add to the team answering calls at the contact centre.⁴¹

³⁵ Janet Dodwell, Minutes of the meeting 24.09.13

³⁶ Lucie Royall, Minutes of the meeting 24.09.13

³⁷ Lucie Royall, Minutes of the meeting 24.09.13

³⁸ Information provided by the service

³⁹ Records kept by the service for June and July 2013

⁴⁰ Report to Housing Committee 'Access to Housing' 13 November 2013 [http://present.brighton-hove.gov.uk/Published/C00000709/M00004770/AI00036797/\\$20131104154515_004857_0019399_201310241429200048570019137CommitteeReportTemplate040913vRC.docA.ps.pdf](http://present.brighton-hove.gov.uk/Published/C00000709/M00004770/AI00036797/$20131104154515_004857_0019399_201310241429200048570019137CommitteeReportTemplate040913vRC.docA.ps.pdf)

⁴¹ Report to Housing Committee (see above)

Is the service located in the right place?

- 8.16 The panel asked officers if it would be useful for the service to be relocated to the Housing Centre. The HSAs felt that because most of the other housing service teams were based in the Centre, they:

*'...would very much benefit from being there as they would be able to work with other housing colleagues and cut out delays in having to wait for responses to queries. This can only happen if we had less access points to resource.'*⁴²

Recommendation 4

The panel feel that the Housing Customer Service team should plan to co-locate their telephone contact centre to the Housing Centre. This would help staff to network to resolve residents' cases quicker because the team require strong links with many other specialist teams, most of which are based at the Housing Centre. If this relocation is being planned, the panel would like to know when it will happen. The panel also seeks reassurance that the effect of any relocation of the service is taken into account in the business plan for ICT.

Following up enquiries

- 8.17 The panel heard that the only way the HCST could tell whether a query passed onto another team had been dealt with was that:

*'...the tenant would normally phone back if they had not received a response.'*⁴³

The HSA would then investigate what stage the query had reached and why it had not been responded to.

- 8.18 The online resident survey found that while 55% of those referred to another team said 'yes' issues were resolved quickly and efficiently, 31.5% said 'no' and 13% 'don't know'.
- 8.19 The panel were extremely concerned that the ICT systems did not enable the staff to find some means to measure both the path and outcome of residents' queries.

What kind of queries and housing knowledge

- 8.20 A team leader explained a challenge faced by the service was that:

⁴² Ben Reeves and Ellen Fisher, Minutes of the meeting 24.09.13

⁴³ Minutes of the meeting 24.09.13

‘...the team were not expected to have in-depth knowledge about the various departments in housing to enable them to answer incoming queries’⁴⁴

8.21 The HSAs told the panel they had access to 14 systems and needed to have a broad range of knowledge of housing issues. A variety of queries were raised by residents, including lost keys, repairs and anti-social behaviour. The top five reasons for residents making an enquiry at reception were recorded as:

- Housing Benefit (22%)
- Homemove (11%)
- Here to see someone (6%)
- Keys in/out (6%)
- Repairs (6%).⁴⁵

8.22 HSAs have a quick reference guide to help them resolve queries; this includes information about Housing Benefit, Homemove, repairs and other key areas.

8.23 Queries could be difficult to solve:

- If the HSA had insufficient knowledge of the housing departments
- Due to changes of staff in the housing departments.⁴⁶

8.24 There was concern that *‘some of the local knowledge has been lost’* in the restructure. The HSAs did say that they had induction training and *‘could always ask for support’*.⁴⁷

9. Conclusion

9.1 The panel understand the reasons for establishing the Housing Customer Service Team. Given the challenges that are identified in this review, the panel feel that is important for the service’s forward plan to tackle the important issues raised in this review and identify the key tasks and milestones for service. The panel think that the key priority is to have a business plan for the introduction of the new ICT system. So their recommendations are aimed at addressing the following concerns:

- Producing data which can be used to monitor and improve the performance of the service
- A plan for introducing a new and effective ICT system, such as a Customer Experience Management (CEM) system
- Making the best use of the current ICT system until this is replaced

⁴⁴ Minutes of the meeting 24.09.13

⁴⁵ Figures recorded by the service for July 2013

⁴⁶ Ben Reeves and Ellen Fisher, Minutes of the meeting, 24.09.13

⁴⁷ Ben Reeves and Ellen Fisher, Minutes of the meeting, 24.09.13

- Co-locating of the service with the teams they work with.

10. Monitoring the recommendations

- 10.1 The panel believe it is very important to monitor the progress of these recommendations and would like to receive a monitoring report on the implementation of the requested ICT business plan at 12 months and 24 months in line with the stages of this plan for the service. They would also like a report to go to Housing Committee for information in 12 months on the implementation of all the recommendations.